

D
D
0
0
0
0
0
6
8
0
4
9



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

TRENCH

Ode from Italy in time of war.

PR
5671
T7
02

ODE
FROM ITALY
IN TIME *of* WAR:
NIGHT ON
MOTTARONE

HERBERT
TRENCH

LONDON • METHUEN • MCMXV

ODE

FROM ITALY
IN TIME *of* WAR:
NIGHT ON
MOTTARONE

by

HERBERT
TRENCH

11

Copyright 1915 Firenze, by the Author

First printed May 1915

ODE FROM ITALY IN
TIME OF WAR: NIGHT
ON MOTTARONE

I.

SINCE in their tents together by a sword
The nations sleep divided; since the seas
Of memory sever; and the cauldrons formed
Of old time make wind-craters full of tongues
Opposed, and zones of different decrees;
Since hatred trembles in the singing chord,
And in ourselves still the old savage throngs
Lurk on, cave-dwellers in the gentle breast;
Since the stone-age man sits as our right-hand guest,
And secular coils of Chthonian energies,
Dark trains of purpose script will never know,
Involve in wrestlings blind the politics
And interlock the peoples to their woe;
In soul, aim, stature diverse, we are stormed
By battle yet, and are the sport of fears
Through the rushing of unstable atmospheres;
Since thus, thus, thus, and thus we fail,
And enmities exhaustless us assail,
Is it in vain for innocence we strive?
Is it in vain that we became alive?

II.

Our dearest, our young sons, have gone to slay.
But we, too old with them to march and die,
Though angry-mooded yet at being disused,
Racked by the vast and melancholy fray
And the wound in Europe's side from shore to shore
To-night have climbed up from the plains confused
To the foothills that look forth on Lombardy,
To the mountain of the herdsmen, that high prow
Of Mergozzòlo, flanked by torrents hoar,
That ship of granite and of porphyry
Which anchored between deep gulfs keeps its bow
Toward Ossola's mighty vale's debouching snow
Whence the primordial glaciers southward pressed.
Stark ship of granite and of porphyry!
It clove the invading glaciers on its breast,
So that one branch Orta scooped, and one the lake
Maggiore. Darkness falls. We have come far
By goat-foot path and shrine and ridge far-seen
And round the steep flanks dyked with little rills
Up from soft chestnut-woods to fell and scar;
Scaling the secret forest-dark ravine —
Where the mountain's ancient passion yields its tones
Dash'd broken, young and pure, against the stones —
To see the dawn from the cloud-bearing hills
Of shepherds, and with herdsmen to take rest.

III.

The herd of glaciers from these brooks has run,
Leaving great boulders lone to mark the sway
Of their moraines, rude confines of a day.
Through the same gates, fore-goers of the Hun,
Goth, Carthaginian pierced, and passed away.
We now, the riper peoples, rightly sure
We must withstand the harsh and immature,
The bitter-hearted, toss'd from dream to dream,
Fiercely unstable — in all things extreme —
These overlordship-seekers; we intent
That the spirit of every folk shall take its bent
Sunward, and wayward in experiment
Adventure, — each small nation stand uncurbed —
We shall put down the aggressors, unperturbed....
For what is life's chief enemy? Not they
But the sense of human life's futility.
The vainness of ourselves, as of our foes —
To that swift passage what can Man oppose;
Who, brawler between two lights, God and Death —
Sun-marshall'd and moon-tended — journeyeth?
What of clear natures and enduring can
Enter the hot and childish discord, Man?
Flowing or floating — what of worth can be
Establish'd?

Courage, Awareness, the pois'd Soul.

The rooted forest-people's polity
Profound; of forest verdure that stands true
And rooted in its own slopes' golden bowl
Spreads free. Here every happy mead
Hath windflowers of a different hue;
And sun-born Love, the mountain flower, is bred,
And, family by starry family,
Spreads chalices, whereof each petal young
Is a new life: fresh Awareness — tenderly swung
And diffused as moveth a breeze over grasses and trees —
Of more: all other men's lives, all other men's ease...
Guard we this new Soul against tyrannies.
The soul is end enough, if nought else is
To come to flower against the precipice.
Yonder in Brescia bronze-wing'd Victory
Doth still in her subalpine temple stand,
Holding a vanish'd shield beneath her hand:
Her sons will not to the north's menace yield.
Rather than live unworthy of their land
Some will forego existences and fames,
Theirs will be written with the unknown names
Inscribed for ever on the vanish'd shield;
The viewless shield itself, their souls shall be.

IV.

Therefore, O Latin barrier, when day breaks,
Far as your sea-republics and faint shapes,
Floating islands, divine cities luminous,
Defiant nursed under the Rhaetian capes,
We, strangers, fast in spirit your allies —
Have you not framed, have you not founded us? —
Now will take counsel of your heads of white,
The snowy conclave of the arena bounded
By the Alps, the amphitheatre of peaks;
Pelasgian and Ligurian hear, — sea-races
Still surging, murmuring, creating, round your bases
Since Pytheas joined them to the Orcades;
That, when the silver tubes of Dawn are sounded
Over Sesia and the shining tributaries
Congiora and the tribes of promontories
From Resegone to the Graian wall —
Padua to Monte Viso — when outleap
The cataracts of wild rays into the lakes
And the eyelids of the land Hesperia
Uplift, we also may shake off our sleep,
Put off the dark and the barbaric spell,
Arise, and thinking of the risen glow
When Hellas thrilled with rays the vine of night
Hesperia, watch her great plains fill with light
As an olive holds her wide cup to the sun

In the endless battle-furrows of that glebe:
And stand, to hearken what the silent say,
The tongues of white fire, immarcessible;
And grow to calm, if calm may be attained
And clear-soul'd Justice from on high be deigned.

V.

The kine-herd's pipe comes home beneath the hill
Along Vergente's upland valleys still,
Blocked by the snowcapt mountains; kine and sheep
Tawny and dark, in following, graze their fill.
Their neck-bells wander round the bastions steep
And wandering fingers teach the stops at will
Melodies cool as water, soft as sleep. . . .
Dark heavens, that take no part in all our stir,
Dark heavens, that seem in calm to arbiter
The fellow vault of fire, the brain of man,
Now from that height and depth which is your fastness
Confer on the ephemeral your vastness!
O stream of time, the sunrise-colour'd flood
Alive with tremour of ten thousand stars
Dissolved therein like memories in the blood,
Arouse us at this dawn to wake indeed!

But for the instant a street-door unbars
And lets be heard the tread of multitude
Make us alive to those whom we succeed,
Make us alive to our inheritors:
We must not fail the hour for which they bleed.
But hear, within, the pure and the outlasting
Summoners blow their summons through the soul,
To be, in our turn, paeon and forecasting.
Now on our ears, through gates of Death and Pain,
Let the rhythms incommensurable roll
And change. When we too must take up the strain
We join, above these tempests and expanses
That blindly move in ecstasies and trances,
Into an inner rite, which is not blind,
Where equanimity may reign,
The grave and the fraternal rite of Mind.

VI.

We cast off blankets, we who have not slept,
And grope forth up the cold dews of the hill.
The fever-charged, numb, watchful Night has crept,
Uneasy dying, towards tremendous Day.
Dawn is not yet: and all's enswathed in chill,
Cloud on the grass, clouds washing round the fells,
Forth over battlements and deeps to sway
A curdled sea of fugitive cloud — a spate
Of filmy panic-pale hordes, all, all in flight
One way — the ice-floes of an arctic strait;
But, through clear fissures, darknesses below.

Of the cordon of main Alps — as yet, no sign. . . .
But here and there a threatening tor outswells;
From far abyss one glimpsèd outlier
Couchant, of vassal buttresses; and lo!
White Horn, or Tagliaferro's rigid spine
Slanted, intense, along his ledges sheer. . . .
Ah, brothers, brothers, who could have believed
It cost so much that this wall should be heaved?
But written in these fulgural archives
Of conflicts settled, of denuded hate,
Folded together are the hostile lives.
How they are twinned, who strove to dominate!
How they are twinned, the writhings of the ridges!
Behold, the horror of the upturned edges —
Together the torn strata seek the sky!

VII.

And yet perhaps not all in vain ye die
Whose veins of blazing granite forge the lime
To marble, and the mean to the sublime.
Perhaps, embraced, each fierce antagonist
Took in the other's virtue, and so locked
Became they fountain-heads, on hard foundations,
That might not, but for your ambitions blocked —
Your gorges with the muddied glacier choked —
Your beautiful strengths, wasted on death — subsist,
To slake the thirsts of the divided nations. . . .

A sudden breeze lifts, rending off the pall,
And darkling Italy's white coronal
Appears, the crest of all the barrier,
Wrathborn, unearthly in his fixed mood,
Detached from weakness and from multitude,
Monte Rosa, in the lightless atmosphere.

VIII.

Alone it dreameth, ghostly sovranly,
A tenuous presence, rime-cold, pale as rime,
Above the band of European cloud
Submerging like a slumber Italy,
The seven lakes, the cobweb cities proud,
The shadow Lombardy, the silt of time,
The march and countermarch of history.

Strahlhorn, Alphübel, Dom, and Allelin,
Phantom Alps to the northward, shrink withdrawn
Away from orisons none dare disturb.
Southward his wilderness, tossed line beyond line —
Darkly surmised through heavy veil on veil —
Of toothèd basalts, bare of snow and pine.
Out over Orta's gorges giddily
Wings waver forth. No insect chirp sounds here...
What clash of cymbal armies now again
Noised upward from their golden burial plain
On wings of victory released, could fill
Time with an exultation like that hill
While unto space the hill lifts up no voice?
While its desolation puts no vesture on
Of light, the memory of fire, nor emerges
The faintest brilliance from beyond the verges,
It keeps night-measure with the vanished sun,
And answers, to a yet immenser poise.

Now shall our virgin mother Liberty —
The rock-bred daughter of the lightnings — she
Cradled in welter of these peaks at war —
Conceive, at the arising of a star?
But it waiteth, that grey shape, far up, aloof:
As the night-watchman, ten years on the roof
Of Agamemnon, till the beacons' joy
Declared from sea to sea the fall of Troy.

IX.

And then, upon that presence in the air,
Outpost Promethean, Earth's protagonist,
That nothing saw beyond our realms of mist,
Slow from the zenith is downbreathed the rose. . . .
(Hush, the world's candle! — every star grows pale)
Until the nine-peak'd ocean-mantling mass
Lit — every cleft and cranny of its snows
And sea-curved crystals, into which arose
The groaning precipices — with peace superb,
Becomes the altar of the soul of Dawn. . . .
Prostrate night-vapours travel down each vale
In darkness, the obscurers and the frail —
But the ancient iron summit in his shroud
Of radiance, every pike and bastion dour
Belted with awe of glacier and crevasse,
Floats up, transfigured, at this limpid hour,
A new acropolis of morning rosed,
A walled and heavenly city, clear as glass —
Aerial, lighter than a branch in flower —
An absolute, but of our strifes composed.



By the Same Author

Deirdre Wedded and Nineteen other poems -
Methuen & Co. London - (Second impres-
sion). 5/-.

New Poems, including Apollo and the Seaman,
Stanzas to Tolstoy, and the Queen of Goth-
land - Methuen & Co. - (Second impres-
sion). 5/-.

Lyrics and Narrative Poems including fifteen
other poems - London, 1912. 5/-.

All the above, including the pre-
sent work, are copyrighted
in the United States
of America.



"L'ARTE DELLA STAMPA"

TIPOGRAFIA SUCC. LANDI

FIRENZE

DR
5617
T7 02

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.

Series 9482



